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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of an Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title I preschool education program, which stressed listening habits and language skills, on disadvantaged children in kindergarten and first grade was examined. Graduates and nongraduates were administered The Boehm Test of Basic Skills and a teacher completed adjustment rating scale. Teachers were asked to provide data concerning parent attendance at scheduled conferences and parent interest in their child's progress or school activites. In both kindergarten and first grade, preschool graduates were identifiable on the basis of test scores and adjustment ratings. These findings indicate that participation in a language-based preschool program does have positive effects on achievement in cognitive skills and school adjustment in kindergarten and first grade. A child's participation in the Title I preschool program does not appear to have a positive influence on parental involvement, as measured by parent attendance at conferences or other overt indications of interest in the child's school activities. However, the parent interest variable does not appear to be a significant factor in the child's achievement in kindergarten and first grade. (BJG)

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A Follow-Up Evaluation of a Preschool Program

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Graduates of a Title I preschool program were identifiable in Grades 1 and Kindergarten by testing in cognitive skills and by rating school adjustment. Program emphasis on listening skills was noted, and implications for parent involvement were discussed. Instrument reliability was estimated to be acceptable.

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Probably the two best known studies of early childhood education were the Westinghouse evaluation of Headstart (Westinghouse,1969) and the preschool program headed by Rick Hebert in Milwaukee (Gerber, 1973) and criticized by Page (1972). The general conclusions were mixed at best and often confusing. Even compilations of research reviewed seemed contradictory.

Burton White (1973), presented three "rather momentous conclusions": (1) Children who were six months or more behind at age three were not likely to ever to be academically successful. (2) The role of schools in the education of children has been overemphasized. (3) The role of the family has been underemphasized. White advocated helping families to educate their own preschool children and waiting until age five or six to begin formal schooling. Moore et al (1972) had earlier raised many issues in sending children to school at too early an age.

The following year, Steele (1974), in a comprehensive review of the literature, concluded that, "early childhood education does make a difference in the cognitive development of three to five-year old children....". Bronfenbrenner (1974) tended to support intervention given some of the constraints advocated by White and Moore. Given a common socioeconomic background and roughly equal academic ability, children who receive some school experience prior to kindergarten should show improved functioning in kindergarten. This improvement should be demonstrable in both congitive achievement and school adjustment.

The evaluation of a Title I preschool program for disadvantaged children who showed evidence of lower than average mental ability consisted in part of a follow-up of graduates in kindergarten and beyond. The method of this evaluation was consistent over two years. Classrooms, in which a reasonable number of graduates were resident, were identified and tested with Boehm Test of Basic Skills. A single test administrator tested everyone in each class. Each classroom teacher was asked to fill out an Adjustment Rating Scale for every child in the classroom. The Adjustment Rating Scale also contained questions relative to the involvement of parents in terms of parent teacher conferences, or in some other meaningful way.

The questions that comprised the Adjustment Rating Scale were:

1. Does the child show respect for property by handling carefully the work and play materials that belong to the school?
2. Is the child able to return materials to the proper place in an orderly manner?
3. Does the child show concern for others by sharing material and equipment?
4. Is the child able to communicate verbally about matters of interest to him by using language as a tool for seeking attention and expressing ideas and emotions.
5. Does the child solve problems (which he can solve) relating to group living without calling on the teacher?

6. Does the child show independence by attempting to put on and remove outdoor clothing where possible?
7. Does the child demonstrate a positive self image by not crying or withdrawing from new tasks?
8. Does the child show increasing ability to delay fulfillment of his wishes by waiting short periods for the teacher's attention or for his turn in using equipment?
9. Does the child listen attentively while being given directions, and does he complete a task from verbal directions?
10. Does the child show his interest in stories by listening quietly for the 5-10 minute story and participating in a simple discussion of the story?
11. Parent has attended scheduled conferences.
12. Parent has shown interest in child's progress or school activities in some other way.

Teachers were asked to rate each pupil on a five point Likert Scale from "Always" to "Never". The internal consistency of the scale was estimated as .86. acceptable for the type of measurement conducted.

The results of the study for 1972-73, summarized below, indicated that the graduates of the preschool program were identifiable on the basis of test score information. On every subvariable of the adjustment scale, teachers rated the preschool graduates higher than those students who were comparable in background and supposedly higher in ability.

Table 1 Mean Values for Kindergarten Testing, 1972-73

	Title I Preschool Graduate (n= 39)	No Preschool Experience (n= 122)
1. Boehm Test/Basic Skills	35.05*	34.34
2. Adjustment	3.12*	2.63
3. Parent attended conference	1.77	2.41*
4. Parent showed interest	1.62	1.64

*Significant at .05

The results of the evaluation of 1972-73 suggested that the evaluation should be replicated for 1973-74. In addition, the evaluation was enlarged to include a re-evaluation of the previous graduates to determine if they could again be identified by measurement a year later in Grade One.

The results of the kindergarten replication for 1973-74 showed remarkable consistency with the previous year's results. Again the preschool graduates were identifiable on the basis of test scores and adjustment ratings.

Table 2 Mean Values for Kindergarten Testing, 1973-74

	Title I Preschool Graduate (n= 133)	No Preschool Experience (n =244)
1. Boehm Test/Basic Skills	32.26*	31.13
2. Adjustment	3.94	3.85
3. Parent attended conference	2.22	2.75*
4. Parent showed interest	2.54	2.66

* Significant at .05

Testing Grade One students in 1973-74 resulted in further identification of preschool graduates in terms of basic concepts and adjustment. While fewer parents attended conferences, fewer parents were involved generally. The increase in Boehm scores and the decrease in parental involvement were expected and lent support for the validity of the measurement design.

Table 3 Mean Values for Grade One Testing, 1973-74

	Title I Preschool Graduate (n= 31)	No Preschool Experience (n= 177)
1. Boehm Test/Basic Skills	42.42*	39.90
2. Adjustment	3.34*	3.60
3. Parent attended conference	2.26	2.87*
4. Parent showed interest	3.00	3.20

*Significant at .05

The emphasis of the Title I preschool has been geared toward listening skills. While all preschool programs offer basic training in language, music, physical development, etc., and attempt to increase the self-concept and self confidence of the preschool child, this program offered these and perhaps something more. What many disadvantaged children lack most in school preparation is to hear what a "regular" classroom teacher sounds like. Disadvantaged children often come to kindergarten or first grade never having heard the language used by a public school teacher. Therefore many may have serious difficulty in knowing what the teacher is saying at all.

The Title I preschool program in the City of Springfield was a compensatory education program. Its basic thrust has been to develop listening habits and school language skills in preschool children. The program used the Peabody Kit for the development of basic language skills, and employed certified, elementary teachers teamed with an indigenous aide who was in many cases a mother of a class member. In the Black neighborhoods, Black aides were employed, and in Spanish neighborhoods, Spanish aides were employed. Children entering kindergarten after this kind of preschool experience have found little difficulty in adjusting to school. Adjustment scores in critical areas (such as items 7 and 8) were consistently high for the graduates of the Title I preschool program. Cognitive skills and test taking behavior were also enhanced by the program as evidenced by the evaluation.

The results tended to favor the graduates of the preschool program in all cases. Boehm scores were higher indicating a greater knowledge of basic concepts, and adjustment ratings were higher indicating a greater familiarity with schools and with school routine. However, on the variable

"Parent Attended Conference" the Title I preschool graduate had consistently lower scores. Title I parents were often working parents. Despite what appeared to be less involvement by parents, the children achieved well. The implication was that the effect of preschool served to give the child a sense of security in kindergarten. This is not to say that attending conferences was not important but seemed to make little difference when viewed in relation to the variable "Parent Showed Interest", which was not significantly different between the various groups.

There was some concern that the graduates in 1972 were an atypical, high achievement group. This group was mitigated by the fact that the 1973 graduates were also identifiable on the basis of test scores, while not so identifiable on the basis of adjustment. Springfield Public Schools has every intention of carrying on the longitudinal survey of preschool graduates.

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